

"tocqueville said that modern democracies must choose between the conflicting objectives of freedom and equality. classical liberalism subordinated that passion for equality to the ideal of freedom.

"in contrast, those who call themselves liberals in contemporary america are willing to limit freedom, be it 'freedom to' or 'freedom from,' in order to achieve equality. 'egalitarian' would perhaps be a better word for these people."

benzene #44

october 24, 1988

special "jack kennedy" issue

i recall being told once that newspaper headliners started referring to john kennedy as "jfk" after he told them that he didn't like being called "jack." if this is true, and if pres kennedy was indeed a friend of his colleague lloyd bentsen, why does sen bentsen persist in calling him "jack"?

this is benzene, an approximately monthly ~~sub~~zene, irrelevant during this election season, published by ignatz jerome "mark" lew, who resides at 438 vernon #103, oakland, ca 94610, and can be phoned at (415) 268-8626. sub rates are 60¢ per issue and trades are welcome.

the sample requests continue to trickle in. most of the requesters seem to be under the impression that this zeen has something to do with diplomacy. guess again, boys. last issue did indeed go over an ounce, and i made the further mistake of having it photocopied in san francisco where that sort of thing costs almost twice as much. remember when i said i'd never go over six pages? ha.

i watched most of the final bush-dukakis ~~debate~~ dual interview, and i was pleased by both of them. i even found myself regretting that one of them has to be rejected, strange as that seems. maybe i was just in a good mood. in contrast, the bentsen-quayle dual interview was wholly uninspiring, but it's a better topic of gossip.

not only does quayle have as much congressional experience as candidate kennedy had, he also has as much as candidate bentsen had running for president in 1976 -- more, if you let senate years count for more than house years. brit hume mentioned that, but nobody picked up on it.

bentsen's jack kennedy swipes worked, but i thought he took an enormous risk with them. if quayle had been the least bit clever, he would have answered lloyd's "you were making the comparison, senator," by pointing out that the guy who introduced the kennedy comparison, and repeated it with nauseating frequency during the convention, was michael dukakis -- and he's no jack kennedy either. sen quayle could have then proceeded to remind the viewers that, unlike the current democratic candidate, kennedy wanted to cut taxes, fight communism, etc, making the argument that since kennedy's time the democratic party has been led astray and dukakis is their latest will-o'-the-wisp.

rep beau boulder (i think he's the one) won't like it, but the republicans would do well to subtly promote the "vote twice for texas" movement. bentsen impressed a lot of people during the vice-presidential debate, but it's not clear that the potential support he generated will be transferred to dukakis. indeed, journalists covering the debate were having fun with the idea that a lot of voters wished they could vote for a bush-bentsen ticket.

of course that's a stupid idea, but it's a catchy one that would fly well in the press. influential bush supporters in texas would do their candidate a favor by making conspicuous efforts to convince voters that they can vote for a "bush-bentsen" ticket by voting for bush for president and for bentsen for senator. conservative democrats in texas who might be drawn toward the democratic ticket by bentsen but are suspicious of dukakis would be given the excuse they need to abandon dukakis without feeling as if they betrayed the party. more important, the mentions the "bush-bentsen" gimmick would get in the national news would go a long long way in forwarding the idea that dukakis is out of touch with the political mainstream.

the big question after the vice-presidential debate was, "who won?" it makes good gossip for the newspapers but to the presidential election it is about as relevant as who won the world series. (less relevant, in fact, if the statistics of coincidence count for anything: in eight of the last nine world series held during an election year,

a national league win was followed by a democratic win and an american league win was followed by a republican win.)

bentsend did win the debate, but it won't do dukakis any good. aside from the ideological and geographical pulls (which have already been considered), the running-mates aren't going to make a difference unless one is perceived to be spectacularly incompetent. sen quayle was in danger of being so perceived but that danger is now gone. yes, i know he looked phony and mindless and not at all impressive. yes, i know that nobody is really thrilled about him, and he is the object of ridicule among many voters (most of whom would never vote republican anyway). sorry, but that's not enough. he'll be talked about and joked about a lot, and voters will tell pollsters that they're really concerned about him (just as they used to say they were concerned about meese, remember him?) but when it comes right down to it, the quayle issue will influence very few votes.

for the democrats, that is very bad news. the quayle issue was dukakis's last big opportunity. now, short of an extraordinary turn of events, he can't win the election. i started writing the rough draft of my bush-is-gonna-win prediction after the vp debate, figuring even if dukakis won the final debate, it wouldn't matter. ironically, it was when dukakis lost that my confidence in the prediction was shaken, because all the pundits -- all of them -- started saying bush had the election wrapped up. i see bush winning because i think the flotilla of politically unmoored voters has been torpidly drifting toward bush, and dukakis has done nothing to stir up the waters and now it's too late. now, i'm not sure if i really thought the presumption that bush had won would actually alter that dynamic or if that was just a rationalization for my characterological reluctance to be caught predicting the same thing everyone else is predicting. as it turned out, the wait-a-minute-it-ain't-over-till-its-over antithesis soon evolved and we're back to where we were. there's still time for a small dukakis surge, which i expect, but it will peter out a few days before the election.

my numbers aren't quite as high as the ones ventured on the pbs talking heads shows i watch. i still think dukakis will sneak out a few states which used to be contested but have recently been put in the bush column (e.g., MI, MO, KY). i see bush with about 330 votes if he wins CA and about 310 if he doesn't. the difference in the figures is 20 rather than 47 because i think dukakis can win CA if he puts some money in it, but if he uses too much money there he'll lose a few swing states back in the midwest.

the election in california may as well be a crapshoot. anyone who hopes to win brux's election pool will do well to submit one entry with a democratic CA and one with a republican CA. aside from counting the money spent there, there is no useful way to analyze the CA election. in other states you can try to figure out what the voters are thinking, but here the voters are such shallow nitwits that there's nothing to figure. californians would save themselves a lot of trouble if they were to abolish the election and cast the state's 47 votes by lottery instead. rather than buying time on television, candidates could increase their chances of winning by buying lottery tickets directly from the state.

SCRABBLE

has anyone else noticed that if you stare at the scrabble map (see next page) you start to see little gray dots in the corners? weird.

there were no kibitzers this turn. i think i confused everyone with all my bruxian talk about how i'd deal with the flexible deadlines. this indicates to me that in houserules, as elsewhere, excessive regulation destroys incentives, so in true libertarian spirit, i won't even set a deadline this time. just send in orders, okay? all the information you need is on the map, so you have no excuse.

another possible explanation for the lack of kibitzing was that there aren't any good plays to be made this turn. indeed there aren't even very many bad ones. sez chuff: "scrabble move is uninspired, but serves to clear out a couple of duplicate letters while keeping the board tight. I7:goad;go,la,od=18. beat that, jake."

the score is 85-61. AGV remains on rack a. jake draws three tiles and rack b now contains HIIOPUSU.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
A=1	A															
B=3	B															
C=3	C															
D=2	D															
E=1	E															
F=4	F															
G=2	G															
H=4	H															
I=1	I															
J=8	J															
K=5	K															
L=1	L															
M=3	M															
N=1	N															
O=1	O															

TRIPLE WORD SCORE

DOUBLE WORD SCORE

TRIPLE LETTER SCORE

DOUBLE LETTER SCORE

Rack contains: H I I O P S U. Send your move to: mark d lew
 438 vernon, #103
 oakland, ca 94610

FASHION

here in the east bay we have the most left-wing congressional quartet this side of the connecticut river. the region's four representatives (districts 7-10) have an average ada (lib) rating of 96.25 and an average acu (cons) rating of 2.75. still, i find one of them to be quite likeable. pete stark attracted my attention when i found out the american medical association spent \$300,000 to try to defeat him in the last election. turns out he's unabashedly liberal on the gooey issues, but stylistically he's a pragmatist and a deregulator. he's also an obnoxious, arrogant smart-ass ("puckish" says barone & ujifusa), and that appeals to me. this summer he married a successful businesswoman 24 years his junior (mr stark is 56). the previous summer he was briefly in the news as the guy who would openly attest to the rumor that gary hart had had an affair with a certain ex-wife of a washington reporter. how did he know? "because," says pete, "i had an affair with her too."

now, pete's back in the news criticizing congress's shameless drug bill. sez he: "because of a serious lack of personnel, space and resources, we currently turn away 90 percent of those who voluntarily seek drug or other substance-abuse treatment. half of those who seek treatment are under the age of 18; the typical waiting list is six months to eighteen months: only one-third to one-half of those who first seek treatment will actually reapply after the waiting period." if what mr stark says is true, one has to wonder if the expensive police war on drugs, as well as the decriminalization debate, isn't beside the point.

nonetheless, it continues to amuse me, so here are some more letters:

mark berch (8/12): "sure, i'll argue the case for the legalization of heroin, and i'll do it in your ballpark. you say, 'a drug user harms not only himself, but others as well.' in the case of heroin, this is wrong. it is the criminalization of heroin which causes most of the harm done to the person, and nearly all the harm done to society.

"once a person is well and truly hooked on heroin, he or she will do whatever it takes to get more for their next dose. prostitution, burglary, armed robbery -- that's what it takes to pay for an illegal drug. if it were legal, basically all you would need is a steady job. there is a staggering amount of urban crime that is caused by the needs of heroin addicts to come up with the price of an illegal drug. the use of dirty needles causes the spread of hepatitis and aids -- not heroin itself. heroin overdose, followed by medical treatment and detox (permitting the cycles to start again) is nearly always caused by the addict not realizing how potent that particular batch is.

"we have two clues as to what would happen if heroin would be legalized. the first is the british experience. it's little known in this country, but since the '60s, someone registering as an addict in britain can get prescriptions for opiates. you give up some of your personal freedoms to go on the program (roughly the equivalent of being on parole in this country) and if you are already wanted for some crimes, you'll be arrested. so not everyone who is an addict goes on the program. it was quite controversial when it began, because of the fear that it would greatly increase the number of addicts. this hasn't happened. after subtracting some people who had entered britain as addicts and who for some reason were not deported, the program has grown only slightly faster than the growth of the age group that tends to start with opiates (generally, 15-20, i vaguely recall). heroin-related crime and hepatitis, etc, is far, far, far less of a problem because people don't need to rob to get heroin. they also don't need to find new users to sell heroin to, which often happens in this country when addicts turn for a period to low level sales to support their habit. in the process, the british have learned that heroin itself is not a particularly dangerous drug, provided that the user has clean needles and knows exactly how much he is getting (knows how pure it is). one study showed that, correcting for race, education level and age, a registered addict had almost three times as high a chance of holding a job as an unregistered addict. leaving aside arrests for possession, the unregistered addict has eight times the chance of being arrested for a criminal offense than an unregistered addict. this is because (a) he doesn't have an expensive habit to support and (b) a criminal conviction in most cases will expel him from the program, and if sent to jail, he's off the program.

"our other experience is with methadone in this country. that is a legal variation of heroin. we cloak it with the mantle of 'therapy,' but keep in mind that heroin was first introduced as a therapy for opium/morphine addiction. methadone is every bit as addictive as heroin, and if you don't get it, you will get sick and desperate. there is even a high associated with it for most people, though after you've been on the program for a while, it tends to go away. this tends to be true for heroin too, although the disappearance of the heroin high over time takes much longer. most people accept the idea of government-supplied methadone to block opiate craving, but not the idea of government-supplied heroin to block the craving.

"pure heroin, taken over the long term legally as it has been in england is fairly safe. the most common side effects are some constipation, reduction in libido, and some

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loss of aggression and initiative. ultimately, it becomes something like insulin. british users must get counseling, which helps them to come to grips with why they started in the first place, and to prepare them for the day when they will feel ready to get off the drug.

"legalization of heroin will surely cause short-term problems, but in the long run, it will be better for both the unfortunate addicts and for society at large. we have only so much money to spend on law enforcement, and for this taxpayer, every dollar spent on combatting heroin instead of pcpc is a dollar foolishly spent. the harm from pcpc comes from the drug itself. nearly all the harm from heroin comes from its illegal status."

((on a special edition of nightline on drug decriminalization, a few weeks ago, ed koch cited britain's heroin program as a failure, but i don't recall what his argument was. i took down a few notes on the show, but now i can't find them, so for the time being i'm willing to accept your word rather than the mayor's.))

david hood (8/20): "benzene #42 was interesting as usual. i'm glad you noticed the persuasiveness of my argument, but chagrined that someone of your supposed caliber ((supposed by whom?)) would not see my argument to be as correct as it is persuasive.

"you claim that since my idealistic adherence to individual liberty as the highest standard is not shared by the u.s. public, i should just give up and stop trying to legalize drugs. i disagree. there is a definite libertarian strain of thought embedded in the american experience. the only reason more people don't subscribe to all of its tenets is that people are confused and ignorant. they haven't the time to think through the issues carefully, and have not had forceful advocates of liberty arguing their side as much as advocates of coercion and statism have done.

"your objection to legal drugs is the harm done by drug users to other members of society. as i pointed out in my earlier letter, criminalizing certain activities because of isolated effects of those activities often blurs the distinction between the crime itself (theft, for example) and its root causes (drug dependency, for example). the bottom line is that there is no excuse for behavior which violates the rights of others in most cases -- just isolating the primary cause of the criminal intent does not dismiss the fact that the criminal chose to commit the crime.

"we can try to alleviate the causes of crime, like you say we should do in the case of drugs. but to be consistent, you're going to have to commit to much more action than prosecuting drug addicts. there are many, many 'causes' for criminal activity -- and they cannot be legislated away by social programs or even prosecution. so the only fair thing to do is to hold criminals responsible for their actions regardless of the so-called cause of the crime, not to penalize all members of a certain group just because a few of them are criminals.

"i believe we used to do the same thing in the old west, when our response to the crimes committed by a few malevolent indians was often to slaughter everyone in their villages. effective? perhaps. fair? hardly.

"if your primary concern with drug use is its dangerous effects on non-users, then perhaps you should take note of my point that most drug-related crimes are committed due to the drugs' artificially high prices on the black market. granted, that does not excuse the crime, but to pursue policies that actually encourage crime like that seems to be rather ridiculous -- especially from your point of view. i would probably support a policy which was fair even if it did marginally increase the risk of crime. but since you seem to be insistent that public safety outweighs individual liberty to such an extent, you should be in favor of legalization simply to bring down the drug prices, thus reducing the drug user's 'need' to commit crimes.

"hey, think about it this way. people have the right to drive their car to work, but this does increase the chances of them running over another person who walks to work. obviously the answer is not to ban automobiles -- it is to criminalize the act of running over someone."

me: you must be my only subber who thinks i'm insufficiently libertarian.

as i recall, my original position was that i was skeptical of the decriminalization idea because i think it's too easy to see the advantages of it and too hard to see the disadvantages. i'm prepared to entertain limited experiments based on a

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well-thought-out plan, such as the heroin-addict registration program mark berch suggests, but before i support complete decriminalization, i want to be satisfied that you advocates have thoroughly considered the possible consequences. i still think you have a long way to go. i'll pursue this in my response to your more recent letter, which i expect will barely make it into this issue.

by the way, i'm very disturbed by your remark that people are not libertarians because they are confused and ignorant and have been conditioned by the wrong ideas. that kind of disrespect for the opinions of others and conviction of one's own monopoly on enlightenment is the same sort of thinking that led to robert owen's failed experiments in socialist utopias in early 19th century america, not to mention far uglier experiments in statism around the world. one of the dearest ideals in american thought -- common to classical liberalism, contemporary conservatism, and libertarianism -- is that people are not simply empty vessels waiting to be filled with the right or the wrong ideas. people have both the right and the ability to form their own beliefs, and no government, religion, or intellectual elite has sole possession of the truth. your notion that others would agree with your philosophy if only they knew better is in fundamental conflict with that very philosophy you hope they'll espouse. please tell me you didn't really mean it.

jim burgess (8/18): "can i shoot my 'europhilic moralizing' by you one more time? what i was talking about is that view of america as an immature country relative to the europeans. politics is a game and subject to immaturity by nature. i was talking about society and the 'voters.' america's immaturity is that stuff making our can-do attitude, our refusal to accept death, combining to make us spend more on health care than anyone else, and consumer ourselves to death as our low savings rate is the true cause of the trade problems and international competitiveness problem, etc, etc. by the way, i like larry summers' (duke's chief economic advisor) idea that american competitiveness is suffering because the competitive stock market won't let entrepreneurs 'take the long view and invest in r&d.' firms taking the long view are bought out by conglomerates like g.e. and pushed into short-term profit mode because taking the long view is investment! and our low savings rate makes investment very expensive. in short, it's too expensive to become more competitive. anyway, it was that sort of personal and business maturity that we don't seem to have yet."

me: okay, i understand now.

so what do you and larry suggest to bring back that savings rate and that maturity? i'm intrigued by the suggestion that we ought to put a small tax (say, 0.5%) on stock transactions. the idea is that it would make little difference to long-term investors, but would discourage the short-term guys who are in and out a few times a day. i understand that britain and japan both have a tax of this sort and we don't. true?

ENDORSEMENT (OF SORTS)

if, as i expect, the presidential election is already decided by the time i get home from work on election day, i will probably waste my vote on some silly gesture. however, if it appears that the election could turn on california, i intend to vote for michael dukakis. although mr bush's idea of government's role in america is closer to mine than is mr dukakis's, i think we'd be better off with a dukakis administration (which is not quite the same as saying dukakis would make a better president, by the way).

the main reason for this is that i'd like to see the same party controlling both the congress and the white house. i do believe that the economy is in danger of turning bad. america, and not just the government, is too much in debt. the extent of our indebtedness is disguised, i think, because american assets are overvalued. the prices of american stocks, property, and dollars have held up, but i sense that that has gradually come to be less a reflection of the buyer's belief in their value and more a reflection of the buyer's belief that they'll continue to stay up for a while longer and he'll be able to sell them to someone else before they go down. as this happens, the dollar/stock/property price becomes more a function of speculation than of value, and thus it is liable to come tumbling down. the last time the dollar did that, the

central banks of the other rich nations arrested the fall by buying up 100 billion dollars. i don't think they can be expected to do that again. there are dozens of ways america's poor economic health might manifest itself (and you've no doubt read articles describing most of them). most intriguing that i've heard is the possibility that the real estate market could crash. more likely, i think, is something gradual like an outbreak of insolvencies which spreads as an insolvent's unpaid creditors find themselves unable to service their own debts to creditors who are then unable, etc. (economists are invited to criticize this layman's interpretation.)

whether this potential economic downturn is triggered, diminished, or avoided is going to depend primarily on the extent to which our government spending is decreased. i think that bush, in spite of his more sensible attitude toward many economic issues, is less likely to succeed in this. the republicans, and particularly ronald reagan, have consistently spoken out against government spending, but so far i've seen no indication that any republican president can turn those words into action. for the past seven and a half years the congress and the president have been doing little or nothing to reduce the budget deficit and have been able to blame each other for it. bush has made it clear that he intends to continue reagan's confrontational ("make my day"; "read my lips") and unproductive strategy. a democratic administration would have to take full responsibility for the budget. dukakis may not want to cut spending, but he'll have to. moreover, he's the sort of guy who could pull it off. it is conceivable to me that if pressured to make some tough cuts, he would find the political resolution to go for some big targets (e.g., farm subsidies, social security, miscellaneous entitlements) which no republican would dare go after.

i have mentioned before in these pages that because of the possibility of an economic downturn, a voter should consider trying to elect a president from the party he doesn't like, so that that party's ideas will be blamed. i don't really think that if pres dukakis were to witness a recession the public would clamor for freer markets and a less activist government. however, if pres bush were to witness a recession, i think it's pretty certain that we'd hear all about how republican laissez-faire policies have allowed the economy to get out of control and now government needs to oversee and regulate it so that things never get out of control again. i think that free-market conservatives have failed to recognize how much reagan has done to damage the reputation of their ideas. while he quotes adam smith and extols free trade, his administration has been the most protectionist since herbert hoover's. while he quotes milton friedman and extols free markets, he has furthered the expansion of government's power to direct the flow of the nation's resources. this would be bad enough if he called himself a social democrat, but because he poses as their opposite, the undisguised social democrats are allowed to make arguments like, "this social program (or this tariff) must be legitimate because even a free-market conservative like reagan favored it," or when things go awry, "you guys tried laissez-faire in the '80s and it didn't work; now give us a chance to try our activist economic policy."

part of the reason i'm prepared to countenance dukakis's ideas in economic activism (e.g., universal health care, minimum wage, business-government "cooperation") is that i see no indication that what bush will do will be much different. bush's support for the minimum wage shows me that even on the most basic free-market issue he still thinks that government direction of the market can create prosperity and that the government can empower the disadvantaged by denying them opportunities. his suggestions of new government programs to solve various problems look like those of someone who sees government as a provider and not as an enabler. probably the most compelling reason to vote for a republican is that republicans tend to have a more realistic view of how the world works. they are more inclined to see the world the way it is rather than be seduced by visions of how it ought to be or how they wish it were. that reason is considerably less compelling when the particular republican is clearly an exception to that pattern.

dukakis opponents frequently cite foreign policy as a reason to vote against him (and crime, which is dealt with on a state and local level and is not very relevant to the presidency, bush's attacks notwithstanding). i distinguish foreign policy

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proper and national defense. with all my right-wing economic rantings in the last few issues, most of my subbers have forgotten that i'm a bit of an isolationist. if dukakis doesn't want to support the contras or patrol the persian gulf or invade grenada, that's just fine with me. i really don't think it benefits american interests much to play the super-power game. it certainly isn't worth the money. we spend about \$9 billion a year to maintain a fleet in the indian ocean. what for? to safeguard the flow of oil to japan? to prevent the communist takeover of thailand? come on. it's just there to prove what a macho country we are. i don't need that. ditto for the fleet in the mediterranean. ditto for the fleet in the south pacific. dukakis wants to stop plans to increase our navy by two carrier groups. i'll go farther than that. i'm even willing to join hands with jesse jackson on this one: let's decrease the navy by two instead.

my attitude toward nuclear deterrence is a little different. of course it's extremely unlikely that any soviet will ever think it's in his interest to launch a nuclear strike on the united states, but it is possible, and unlike chaos in lebanon, the closing of the persian gulf, or a communist government in central america, the possibility, however small, is a genuine "vital interest" of the united states. one of the things which most impressed me about al gore is that he, almost alone among politicians, exhibits a basic understanding of why we have a deterrent force. while the right-wingers say we're safer if we have more nukes, and the left-winger say we're safer if we have fewer nukes, he recognizes the fact (which seems so obvious to me) that our strategic force's value as a deterrent depends entirely on it's chances of surviving a first-strike from the other side. furthermore, (unless we hope to attack them some day) it's also in our interest that the soviet's strategic force will survive a first-strike from us. otherwise if a crisis arises and they think we have the ability to wipe them out, they might panic and want to hit us first before it's too late. when experts on nuclear strategy (the subject is not as incomprehensible as it might appear to be) say a weapon system is "stabilizing" they mean that it is good at surviving a first-strike but not very good at wiping out the other guy's deterrent force. similarly, a "destabilizing" system is one that is good at wiping out the other guy's force, but isn't very good at surviving an attack. a simple example of this is that ten little missiles with one warhead apiece is more stabilizing than one big missile with ten warheads with mrvs. (a "mrv" is a multiple re-entry vehicle, a feature which allows a bunch of warheads to ride the same missile for the intercontinental voyage and separate at the end of the trip to hit separate targets.) both have equal capacity to do damage to the enemy, but the one big missile is much more likely to be eliminated in a first-strike.

as is well-known, dukakis's record on nuclear strategy is a bit shallow. for most of his career he's been firmly in the no-nukes-is-good-nukes camp. one of the most intriguing questions of the election is this: given that dukakis has been fairly consistent in his positions through most of his career and has only started flip-flopping this year, and that bush has a long history of flip-flopping, which candidate, if elected, is more likely to stay flopped? i don't know the answer. the candidate will have some attachment to his original positions, but he will also be to some extent bound, whether he likes it or not, to his new ones. in considering mr dukakis's position on national defense it is useful to recall that doves invariably become more hawkish when they reach the white house. i find comfort in noting that when dukakis has moved to the center on defense, he has done so intelligently (perhaps he's been listening to gore). in contrast, bush moves to the center by taking dopey positions like supporting minimum wage and offering half-baked me-tooisms on child care and the environment. i was pleased to note that dukakis has backed down a bit on his opposition to the midgetman, far and away the most stabilizing of the various land-based missile systems. i was thrilled when he said he wants to approach the start treaty negotiations with the goal of identifying and eliminating those weapons systems which are most useful as first-strike weapons. i am pleased by his position on the abm treaty, which is to pressure the soviets to stop violating it, but to consider renewing it. reagan, for all his kvetching about soviet treaty violations, has done nothing to persuade the soviets to dismantle their "radar station" in krasnoyarsk; one has to wonder if he wouldn't rather let it stay so that he'll have a good excuse

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to not renew the treaty. unlike the inf treaty, the abm treaty really does eliminate (prevent) an entire class of weapons. both superpowers will be able to maintain an effective deterrent force less expensively if we leave that door shut. (by the way, the inf treaty was a bad (destabilizing) treaty, though it was well worth signing because the improved diplomatic atmosphere is so much more significant than the more dangerous weapons system balance. i'll give two free issues to anyone who can tell me, within 15 percent, how many nuclear weapons are eliminated by the inf treaty. go ahead, guess. you'll be surprised.)

GOSSIP

the lead-in on page one is from a letter to the editor in the economist by suhn hong, and is the aptest definition of liberalism i've seen recently.

what inspired pinochet to call that election in chile? surely he must have known he'd lose. one has to wonder if he hadn't decided that he wants to be succeeded by civilian rule after he's gone and this is part of his plan for a gradual and orderly transfer of power.

if you thought the presidential campaign was just as sleazy as it could possibly be, take consolation in the realization that it could be worse. national review senior editor joseph sobran mentioned in passing that a bill which young michael dukakis sponsored as a state senator would have made bestiality legal in massachusetts. even lee atwater wouldn't stoop so low as to try to make an issue of that.

dukakis has taken to railing about how america is being bought up by foreigners, what with japanese-owned office buildings and factories turning up all over, and british, french, and german multinationals taking over low-profile american corporations. many democrats who have added this tune to their repertoire are still singing jesse jackson's lament that america's big corporations are "exporting jobs" -- attributing both alleged tragedies to the "oppressive, monopoly capitalist system" or whatnot.

am i mistaken, or are these two alleged phenomena precise opposites? if, for instance, japanese capitalists put 200 million yen into an office complex in los angeles, are they not "exporting" japanese jobs to the united states? if, for instance, general electric builds a plant in south korea, are we not "buying up" that nation? logic dictates that america's total investment abroad minus the total foreign investment in america is either an increasing amount (in which case we aren't being bought up) or a decreasing amount (in which case we aren't exporting jobs).

because job creation in other industrialized nations hasn't even come close to matching the rate here, it's pretty clear that this amount (which economists no doubt have a name for) is decreasing. what is interesting here is not that this is a difficult contradiction to puzzle out. what is interesting is that the cheerleaders who make up the committed core of a political party will repeat any appealing argument, oblivious not just to whether those arguments agree with reality, but even to whether they agree with each other.

LETTERS

david hood (9/20): "mind if i take exception to a few points made by you and ed wrobel in the last benzene?"

"1) you argue that i am touting the traditional republican line that tax increases slow economic growth, thus no tax increases. that is not quite right. while i agree with that position, it is the spending side that i am most concerned with. as you eloquently pointed out, most of these government programs are tremendous wastes of resources that only serve to hamper the free market's ability to do things like narrow the rich/poor gap. i generally oppose any measure which will increase the state's power to waste more money, tax increases included. ((ok))

"2) ed wrobel states, 'one person's freedom in many instances necessarily limits another's freedom,' a point from which few would take exception. he posits that one man's right to smoke interferes with another's right to free air, which is simply an error in phrasing. a person does not have the 'right to pollute someone else's air,' and few libertarians who are sensible would disagree. my focus as far as rights are concerned is to prevent people from harming other people's life, liberty, and property. i do not believe in absolute license.

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"applying this to the drug legalization issue, clearly someone who commits a crime while under the influence is doing something wrong. but the guy stoned in his own apartment is not infringing on others' rights. let's punish the criminal activity itself, not punish everyone in a particular class because some within that class are not responsible. but we've already been through this -- .

"3) sorry about the dukakis stuff. from the issue i read i surmised that you were leaning in his direction. ((turns out you were right after all))

"4) good point about minimum wage and the artificial antagonism supposed between business and labor. did you say you were a democrat? the only democrats i ever heard in favor of free-market principles are the ones in rural north carolina -- who refuse to call themselves republicans because that would mean being a goddamn yankee son-of-a-bitch. yet the last time they voted democratic was 1948 -- .

me: i've heard that charles murray is a democrat....

i'm registered as a democrat, and i think of myself as one. i do disagree with them more often and more passionately than i do with republicans, but not so much more that i'm comfortable calling myself a republican. most of my politically minded friends are democrats, so if i have something to say to them, even if its basically a republican idea, i like to speak in democratic terms.

in conjunction with the government's and the culture's collectivism of responsibility, the guy stoned in his room does do harm to others. you can say that that is the fault of the state and not of the stoned person, but to me that is rather like dropping a plate on the floor and, when it shatters, saying that it is the fault of gravity and not of you. no-no-no, you might object, that's different because gravity is an immutable scientific principle. and so it is.

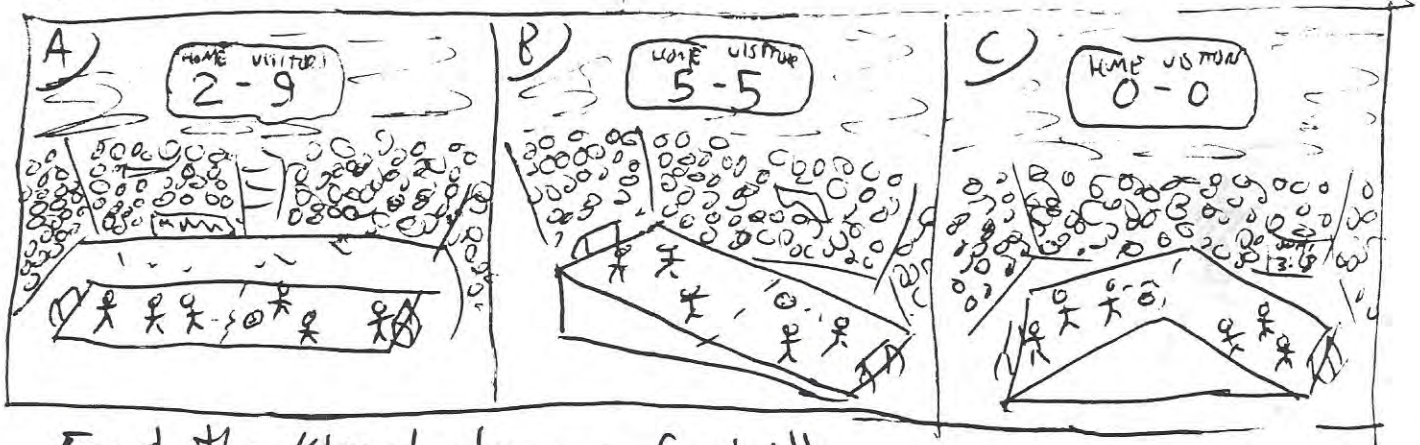
but let's go on to the next step in the drug decriminalization discussion. suppose i agree with you in theory that drugs ought to be legal. how then do you propose to go about it? do you legalize all drugs or just some? which ones? do you have them distributed by doctors or by some government agency, or do you allow them to be sold commercially? do you allow dealers to advertise? do you allow sales to minors? do you write your decriminalization law as a federal law guaranteeing the right to sell drugs, or do you remove federal restrictions thus giving the states the choice of whether or not to decriminalize? what happens if north dakota legalizes drugs and south dakota doesn't? what stops the drugs from crossing state lines? to what extent are drug dealers regulated? do they need a special license? if licensing requirements are strict, what prevents the black market from continuing? are suppliers required to include warnings on their packaging? must recreational drugs be approved by the food and drug administration? if so, what happens during the four years after decriminalization while we wait for them to be approved? will crimes committed under the influence of drugs be prosecuted differently? will suppliers be held liable?

proponents of decriminalization prefer to avoid these questions because they focus attention on specific consequences of decriminalization rather than on those theoretical generalities which look so good. on the one hand they argue that drug crimes are perpetrated because of the artificially high prices which are the result of drug illegality. on the other hand they say that the guy smoking pot on weekends isn't hurting anyone so give him a break. but you can't have it both ways. if you decriminalize everything, you are encouraging chaos and giving license to people who, unlike the mild-mannered pot-smoker, surely are hurting others. but if you only decriminalize a few tame drugs, or if you impose strict licensing requirements, you'll leave a large unmet demand. addicts, by their very nature, are not satisfied with moderate consumption. give an addict a modest dose and eh'll ask for a bigger one; give him a mild drug and he'll ask for a stronger one. if you draw the line somewhere -- anywhere -- he'll look for satisfaction elsewhere, and there's that darn criminal black market which you said decriminalization would get rid of.

CODA

the other two letters i have ready are both too long, so i'll stop here. there's a better than usual chance that the next issue will be out soon after this one.

PICTURE QUIZ!



Find the "level playing field."

P.S. Thanks
to the letters
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inside.

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